



## GERANIUM CULTURE FOR HOME GARDENERS

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Geraniums are among the most popular flowering plants. Outdoors they are used as annual bedding plants, in hanging baskets, in pots and in window boxes. Indoors they are cultured as houseplants in sunny locations.

Common geraniums are actually members of the genus *Pelargonium*, while members of the genus *Geranium* include native wildflowers and herbaceous perennials. Major types of common geraniums grown by home gardeners include:

**Common Garden Geraniums or Zonal Geraniums** - *Pelargonium x hortorum* is the common geranium. Sold as bedding plants, they are compact in habit and often have fancy leaves marked by distinct bands or zones of darker pigments, tri-colored leaves or leaves with silver or white markings. Flowers may be single or double, are clustered into heads, and range from red, pink, salmon and white.

**Martha Washington Geranium** - *Pelargonium x domesticum* is sold by florists during the winter as a flowering pot plant. It is not heat tolerant, and will not perform as well outdoors as common geranium.

**Ivy-Leaved Geraniums** - *Pelargonium peltatum* is the ivy-leaved geranium. It has a vinelike growth habit with smooth, leathery leaves and flowers with narrower

petals and less dense flower heads. It is commonly seen in Europe used in window boxes, and is attractive in hanging baskets where it may grow to 3 or more feet in length.

**Scented-Leaved Geraniums** - *Pelargonium graveolens* is the Rose-scented geranium; *P. crispum* is the Lemon-scented geranium; *P. x fragrans* is the Nutmeg geranium; *P. odoratissimum* is the Apple-scented geranium; and *P. tomentosum* is the Peppermint geranium. Plants have a wide range of foliage types and habits; and are used for making potpourris, sachets, and to flavor teas. They make excellent houseplants, and many have soft, finely textured foliage which is pleasing even though the flowers are small and not showy.

**Mosquito Geraniums** - A new plant developed by implanting genes of one species into another is the "Mosquito Plant," a scented *Pelargonium* species with introduced genes which code for production of oil of citronella. The citronella fragrance is released when the leaves are rubbed or crushed. Commercially, oil of citronella is extracted from the tropical grass, *Cymbopogon nardus*, called Citronella grass. The "Mosquito Geranium" is advertised as a natural mosquito repellent, but research has not been conducted to prove the validity of this claim.

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